

**Testimony of Susan Lloyd Yolen, Vice President, Public Policy & Advocacy,
Planned Parenthood of Southern New England , February 19, 2013**

Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. I'm Susan Yolen, Vice President of Public Policy for Planned Parenthood of Southern New England. PPSNE is the state's largest provider of family planning and reproductive health care, serving nearly 70,000 patients annually in Connecticut and Rhode Island.

2013 marks the 40th anniversary of many significant milestones for women. 1973, in retrospect, was quite a year.

Adoption of the federal Title IX protections have meant that equality for women in education and school sport has been guaranteed. Connecticut is a state where this is particularly well celebrated. We recently commemorated *Roe versus Wade* and 40 years of safe, legal abortion: a ruling that has both saved lives and contributed considerably to the improved status of women in society. Forty years ago many colleges and universities first launched women's studies programs and, with them, newfound appreciation for the heroines in our past, and for the battles those rights including the vote, which they waged thanklessly, and often did not live to experience. Despite their forty year histories, none of these programs or policies is considered outmoded, too costly or unimportant to be perpetuated. It cannot be claimed that we've evolved beyond needing these policies to advance the status of women...or we wouldn't need to continue to press for policies like the Violence Against Women Act, being held hostage in Congress as we speak.

In 1973 the PERMANENT Commission on the Status of Women was founded in Connecticut. Someone clever made sure the word *Permanent* was central to title of this fledgling state commission. Planned Parenthood has partnered with the PCSW through the decades. We aren't just proud to call the PCSW staff and commissioners our colleagues. We are proud to live in a State that, through thick and thin, has maintained that the value of Connecticut's women (the *majority* of the residents of our state) demands the preservation of this commission. And that improving the lot of women is worth the modest state budget line item that insures that CT has an entity with the statutory authority to speak for women.

Others tonight will attest to the PCSW's role promoting economic stability, pay equity, resources and training for women who work, whether at home or outside of the home, in traditional or nontraditional jobs. I will speak very briefly of the Commission's commitment to the *health* of women.

The PCSW has understood that women's ability to raise healthy families depends on their own good health. Through coalition efforts led by PCSW, agencies and individuals across the state have worked together on programs to improve access to diagnosis and treatment of cancer, on efforts to support women with disabilities, services to older women such as Medicaid, and on insuring that reproductive health care is available across our state.

Given the changing nature of the health delivery system and the common fact of our community hospitals merging and affiliating, or facing buyers from out of state, the PCSW has had the unique statutory mandate to intervene, ask the relevant questions, and hold these merging health providers accountable for maintaining a level of access to full reproductive health care in a community following a merger, including access to emergency contraception in the ER, routine birth control services, post-delivery tubal ligation and abortion services.

Creation of a multi-purpose commission, as proposed by the Governor, that would address the multitude of issues considered important to women, racial and ethnic minorities as well as the gay and lesbian community does a disservice to the needs each of these groups. No single commission can do a competent job advancing these varied interests, some of which are complex and require community education, outreach and coalition building.

Planned Parenthood understands that times are challenging and our state budget is tight. Elimination of an independent, effective legislative commission with a mandate to protect the interests of the majority of our citizens, however, is ill conceived. Forty years later the PCSW is not an experiment...it is a lifeline for thousands of women. It should be preserved, as should the other commissions, to continue its mission, until the equal status of women is no longer at issue in Connecticut.